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Generations Interview Data

Dr. Grace, EDU 402

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Grammy, b. 1934 (Veterans/Silent Generation)

Q: What were the expectations of the educational system for the students?

A: If you got through 8th grade, you were doing pretty well! Most students did not finish high school because they had to work, or go to war. (We were in the height of the Great Depression and the start of WWII.)

Q: What were the expectations of your parents for your education?

A: My mother expected me to graduate from high school, and I did.

Q: What were the expectations of the business world on education?

A: Most businesses expected a high school diploma at the least (like for secretarial work, dental assistant, etc.) but some jobs did not require them (like working in a garage or store or filling station or as a cook).

Q: What were your expectations for your own education?

A: I wanted to graduate high school and go to college, or at least become a secretary, but this was very difficult without the financial help (grants, loans, etc.).

Q: What types of strategies did the teachers use when teaching?

A: Our teachers stood at the front of the room and lectured us. In elementary school, it was mostly rote learning.

Q: What strategies did and did not meet your needs and why? In what setting did you have joy for learning and describe a most memorable teacher that had a major influence on your learning.

A: I don’t know how to answer this, because we didn’t know anything different (different styles of teaching/learning). I did well in everything but math. I liked my history class, where I had a teacher named Mr. Tinkham. He made the class very interesting be bringing in supplemental materials (outside of the textbook) and he had a fun personality. He made each student feel special, and I always got A’s in his class.

Q: What do you remember about the socioeconomic level(s) and the ethnic diversity of the student body?

A: We had VERY little diversity--everyone was white. We never saw a black person in Bridgton. We all came from working class families (lots of farmers and woodsmen).

Q: How were the programs and classes structured and what were your thoughts and responses to it?

A: When I was young we had a two-room schoolhouse (first floor was K-4 and second floor was 5-8 with one teacher on each floor). In high school each class had a homeroom (by grade) and most of our classes took place in the homeroom classroom (the teachers moved classrooms, not the students). Our high school had about 180 students.

Q: What types of classes did you take and how do you feel about the education you received?

A: I felt like I had a good education, perhaps even better than what some students are receiving now. My education was well-rounded and I chose to do a lot of reading on my own. The education I received gave me enough to live a successful, comfortable life.

Q: What do you see as the characteristics of a superior teacher?

A: Compassion, treat them with respect. I think that teachers need to learn to get to know their students and recognize each of them as an individual. The students should be able to relate to the teacher.

Q: Is there anything you wish would have been different about your education?

A: I wish there had been school buses! (I had to hitchhike or walk to school and I wasn’t able to participate in any extracurricular activities due to lack of transportation)

Q: Did your school(s) offer any extracurricular activities? What were they and which ones did you participate in?

A: My high school offered football, basketball, baseball, cheerleading, and some clubs (glee club and commercial club for example). I wasn’t able to participate in much due to the lack of transportation, so I felt rather isolated.

Mom, b. 1967 (Generation X)

Q: What were the expectations of the educational system for the students?

A: The expectation was that the students were going to progress through the school system (grade K-12) and either take up a trade or go to college or the service.

Q: What were the expectations of your parents for your education?

A: My mother never told me what she expected of me, I just knew that I was going to go to college. It was more implied, but I know my mother would have supported me no matter what I did. I was told, however, that when I did go to college, I needed to choose a profession in which I could easily get a job once I graduated, like as a teacher or a nurse.

Q: What were the expectations of the business world on education?

A: Our high school had a program for students who planned on going on a business track (like for accounting, secretarial work, computer programming, etc.) and some of the businesses in town were affiliated with this program. Some students were able to go straight from this program into local jobs associated with the program, while others required a college degree.

Q: What were your expectations for your own education?

A: I wasn’t all that excited about school, but I still got good grades and everything. I was even invited to join the National Honor Society, but I didn’t even bother to fill in the paperwork to officially join. I only went to college so I could get a decent job as a teacher. I had more fun being part of the concert choir and theater programs, and put more time and effort into pursuing my music “career.” I did well in school because it came easy to me, but I wasn’t focused on it.

Q: What types of strategies did the teachers use when teaching?

A: Lectures. Most of the time we would be assigned a textbook to read and then answer questions based on the text and get lectured on it in class. In literacy classes, however, we usually had to read something from outside (like classic novels) and then have to answer response questions and write some essays. We also had science labs that were as hands-on as

it got.

Q: What strategies did and did not meet your needs and why? In what setting did you have joy for learning and describe a most memorable teacher that had a major influence on your learning.

A: Math was the worst, because we would have to do the homework after being lectured, and then we would have to write the answers on the board the next day. I could not learn math from the lecture format. When I went to my teacher for help, he told me that “girls shouldn’t do math.” I also had an English teacher who told me that “blondes were dumb anyway.” My favorite class was my Western Civilization class because I was interested in the subject matter and we worked a lot with outside sources rather than just textbooks. I honestly do not think that I had a favorite teacher, but if I had to choose I would say it was one of my social studies teachers because he was the most fun. He had nicknames for everyone and didn’t take everything so seriously.

Q: What do you remember about the socioeconomic level(s) and the ethnic diversity of the student body?

A: We only had one black student in our high school, and before then we didn’t have any. We had varying socioeconomic levels, with mostly members of the middle class.

Q: How were the programs and classes structured and what were your thoughts and responses to it?

A: Our classes were heavily tracked (I was usually grouped with the college-track students), so we were grouped based on our academic performance. In high school we switched classes based on subject, and mostly all of the classes were lecture-based with the exception of science labs. I did not enjoy the lecture-based format at all. We also had a vocational program and the business track program. We didn’t have any AP classes, but the school did offer honors classes. The grading system was screwed up, in my opinion, because an “A” in shorthand or chorus counted just the same as an “A” in physics or a high-level literacy class. Personally, I felt that the grades should have been weighted differently.

Q: What types of classes did you take and how do you feel about the education you received?

A: I was in a combination of college prep classes and business classes, none of which were honors-level classes. The business classes I took were shorthand, accounting, typing, and a computer class. I don’t think that I got a “bad” education, but I don’t remember having any passionate teachers who really inspired me to do more, and I wasn’t pushed to do better. I got good grades, made it to college easily, and continued my education, and got a teaching job right out of college, but I wouldn’t call my education “ideal.”

Q: What do you see as the characteristics of a superior teacher?

A: I think that a superior teacher needs to have a passion for teaching and an interest behind their subject matter and an interest in their students. They need to have the ability to motivate their students and teach in differentiated ways, and they need to have an understanding of where their students are developmentally. They need to be able to make learning fun and enjoyable.

Q: Is there anything you wish would have been different about your education?

A: It would have been nice to have been pushed a little more, particularly in areas where I expressed talent. I never had a teacher tell me that I had a gift until it was “too late.” For example, my art teacher never told me of my potential until I was getting ready to graduate, and the same went for my writing skills. I always went along thinking I was mediocre because nobody actively acknowledged my talents--they were all very passive. I also wish we had something like advisory groups because it would have been a nice opportunity to build a relationship with a teacher, but we didn’t have anything like that. I didn’t have any help applying for colleges, choosing classes, etc. I had to do it all on my own.

Q: Did your school(s) offer any extracurricular activities? What were they and which ones did you participate in?

A: We offered all the sports and many different clubs. I participated in theater, concert choir, band (flute), chorus.